

## **H&R Block to Support Hurricane Victims via Operation HOPE; National Project Restore HOPE Initiative to Assist Disaster Victims by Providing Financial Advice**

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KANSAS CITY, Mo.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Nov. 16, 2005--H&R Block hopes to provide a volunteer force of up to 500 of its tax professionals to help hurricane victims reconstruct their financial lives as part of Project Restore HOPE, a collaborative relief effort organized by Operation HOPE, Inc., a national organization dedicated to economic empowerment in America's underserved communities.

The initiative, created by HOPE's economic emergency response division HOPE Coalition America (HCA -- a partner of FEMA), provides disaster survivors with free financial counseling and advice through one-on-one counsel, financial help lines and online case management, facilitating their return to normalcy. Volunteers include professionals from the banking and financial services, insurance and other industries. H&R Block is encouraging its tax professionals to volunteer for this important effort.

"Teamwork is a core H&R Block value," said Mark Ernst, chairman and chief executive officer, H&R Block. "By joining forces with Operation HOPE and FEMA, we're creating a stronger effort than any one organization could mount on its own. We appreciate that Operation HOPE's skills, expertise and reach complement our own."

In coordination with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Project Restore HOPE is offering free financial counseling and resources, economic assistance and budgeting advice to hurricane victims. These services are being delivered through one-on-one counseling in disaster-affected communities, at FEMA Disaster Recovery Centers, online and by phone from new call centers in Poway, California, and Dallas, Texas.

Serving as emergency financial counselors, several dozen H&R Block associates from across the country are helping hurricane victims stabilize their financial affairs, receive assistance from government, non-profit and private-sector sources, and cope with the personal financial fallout of this disaster.

H&R Block volunteers also are providing back-up support for Operation HOPE's Dallas call center. In a separate effort, dozens of H&R Block associates have served as intake counselors at FEMA's housing assistance centers in Pascagoula, Biloxi and Gulfport, Miss., since those centers opened several weeks ago.

Another important hurricane relief initiative launched by H&R Block enables taxpayers to obtain prior-year tax returns, even if the individual is not an H&R Block client. Prior-year tax returns are required for those victims seeking fast tax refunds by claiming losses on their amended 2004 tax returns.

"People can go to any H&R Block office and have access to prior-year tax returns so they can apply for assistance," said Ernst. "We help clients efficiently navigate the IRS procedure for obtaining copies or transcripts of their past years' returns. Regardless of whether a household was previously served by H&R Block, we're glad to help with retrieval of this important financial information."

H&R Block is helping hurricane victims reconstruct their financial lives through a variety of other efforts, including:

- Offering taxpayers from federal disaster areas free preparation and filing of amended 2004 returns that claim weather- and theft-related losses resulting from the hurricane. The objective of this effort is to expedite tax relief and access to tax refunds.
- Working with the IRS and state tax authorities to create flexible standards for substitute W-2 documentation for hurricane victims. Many Gulf Coast employers' business records are lost, likely hindering the availability of traditional W-2's for the coming filing season. The company is exploring ways of assisting individuals and businesses across the Gulf Coast in constructing substitute W-2 forms.

-- H&R Block will make its new computer-based training program on Hurricane Katrina tax implications available to select not-for-profit tax preparers for the coming tax season. The program combines content from many of H&R Block's advanced tax courses to help tax preparers better understand Hurricane Katrina-related tax laws.

Nearly 200 H&R Block associates volunteered to provide free advice about insurance, budgeting, home buying and credit assistance in support of Operation HOPE's 2004 Florida hurricane relief efforts. H&R Block volunteers also assisted hurricane victims with referrals for emergency relief, job training and job placement programs. In addition, H&R Block helped some victims file early tax returns to claim property losses.

H&R Block and Operation HOPE have partnered to provide a wide array of financial literacy programs and services to low-income individuals nationwide at select H&R Block offices and at [www.hrblock.com](http://www.hrblock.com). The programs are also available through the HOPE Center in Los Angeles and at [www.operationhope.org](http://www.operationhope.org).

To receive free financial counseling, hurricane victims are encouraged to call Operation HOPE at 1-888-388-HOPE (4673) Monday through Friday, 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. PST and Saturday, 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. They also may contact H&R Block at 1-800-HRBLOCK or at [www.hrblock.com](http://www.hrblock.com).

#### About Operation HOPE, Inc.

Operation HOPE, Inc. (HOPE) is America's first nonprofit social investment bank and a national provider of financial literacy and economic empowerment programs. Through ongoing collaborations and long-term partnerships with leading government, private sector, and community interests, HOPE works to bring self-sufficiency and a sustained spirit of revitalization to America's inner-city communities. At the core of HOPE's mission to eradicate poverty and empower the wealthless is a movement to establish "Silver Rights" or the right to financial literacy, access to capital, and equality of opportunity for the underserved. Three key initiatives work to fulfill HOPE's goals "Banking on Our Future (BOOF)," HOPE Coalition America (HCA) and HOPE Centers. HOPE Centers are responsible for more than 800 new homeowners and small business owners, over \$125 million in funded loans, and an excess of \$240 million in commitments for homeownership and small business loans. In partnership with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and a network of private and community partners, HOPE Coalition America is HOPE's disaster recovery and financial reconstruction pre and post emergency division. It has provided free financial counseling and casework services to Americans affected by natural disasters and national emergencies in 125 cities in 35 states to date. HOPE's financial literacy program BOOF, winner of Oprah's Angel Network Award teaches money management basics to students nationwide through classrooms and online. Taken together, these programs make HOPE the national leader in economic empowerment tools and services for the under-served in America. HOPE and its programs can be found online at [www.operationhope.org](http://www.operationhope.org), [www.bankingonourfuture.org](http://www.bankingonourfuture.org), and [www.hopecoalitionamerica.org](http://www.hopecoalitionamerica.org).

#### About H&R Block

H&R Block Inc. (NYSE: HRB) is a leading provider of tax, financial, mortgage, accounting and business consulting products and services. H&R Block is the world's largest tax services provider, having prepared more than 400 million tax returns since 1955. The company and its subsidiaries generated revenues of \$4.4 billion and net income of \$636 million in fiscal year 2005 from operations in four principal business segments: tax preparation and advice via in-office, online and software solutions; investment and financial advisory services; retail and wholesale mortgage services; and tax/accounting/business consulting services for mid-sized businesses. Headquartered in Kansas City, Mo., H&R Block markets its products and services under three leading brands - H&R Block, Option One and RSM McGladrey. For more information visit our Online Press Center at [www.hrblock.com](http://www.hrblock.com).

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